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## Helping Ourselves

By E. L. KINCAID, C. P. A.

*(In-charge Accountant, Newark Office)*

ABOUT November 15 of each year nervous tension begins to creep upon most of the in-charge accountants in our organization, exacting heavy toll from those affected by its mental and physical weakening processes. The reason for this condition is that we are again at the beginning of a busy season with its large number of new engagements, all engagements demanding more exacting attention owing to our steadily improving methods of procedure. However, the time element involved in this immense amount of work remains comparatively stationary. This latter condition is due principally to the provisions of the Federal income tax law.

The serious problem is up for solution again: that of completing each engagement in the allotted time and still maintaining the standard of service required. Paraphrasing a famous French resolution, we may assert, "It shall be solved!" This means added responsibility for every member of the organization. But undoubtedly we are safe in saying that the brunt of this responsibility falls on the in-charge accountants. The purpose of this article is to suggest a partial solution of this serious problem, which seems to be growing more complex with each passing year.

We acknowledge that the best solution would be the general adoption of the natural business year advocated by one of the founders of our organization, the late Elijah Watt Sells. This plan is coming more and more into general use, and in time no doubt will solve the serious annual problem in question. However, temporary relief must be provided pending the general adoption of the natural business year. This relief must come through "helping ourselves."

Just before the busy season each year our personnel department is overburdened with requests from our practice offices for experienced in-charge accountants. The supply available always falls far short of the demand. The reason for this dearth of men is to be found in the rigid qualifications which Haskins & Sells insist that their in-charge accountants must meet.

What is the solution of this lack of properly qualified men? Obviously, we must develop our assistant accountants in a shorter time than has been our wont. Then when the busy season rushes in upon us, threatening to trample us under, we can utilize our trained assistants and, with a minimum of supervision, render to clients a better service than is possible through the application of almost superhuman efforts on the part of the in-charge accountants, in which they necessarily tend to lose some of their astuteness.

The technical procedure department is doing notable work for our organization, but because of its lack of contact with the majority of our assistant accountants, we cannot expect this department to undertake the development of the individual assistant. The assistant must be trained while employed at his daily work, through thoughtful direction, planning, and instruction by the manager, supervising accountant, and in-charge accountant. It is admitted that this supposedly is the manner in which the assistant is trained at present, unintentionally so perhaps in a majority of cases.

Generally the manager and in-charge accountant attack an engagement with the sole thought of completing it as soon as possible, rendering, of course, our usual standard of service. The feeling often is

that the assistant accountant is merely a necessity to every engagement, who must do certain work well. However, through the thoughtful assignment of assistants by the manager, and a proper appreciation by the in-charge accountant of his ability, yet, his duty, to help the assistant scale the heights necessary to become an in-charge accountant, we can accomplish a great deal.

Even more depends on the in-charge accountant than on the manager. On every engagement the accountant's contact with the assistant affords him the opportunity of helping the assistant to develop. By planning the work so as to give the assistant an opportunity to see the methods employed in the general verification of the accounts, and explaining the reasons for the methods used; by inviting questions on obscure points; by discussing intricate and unsolved problems offered by the engagement (listening attentively to the assistant's remarks, as often he makes very helpful suggestions); and by occasionally giving him the privilege of doing an important piece of work while the accountant in charge does some of the assistant's trying tasks; the accountant in charge is doing his duty to the assistant, to the organization, and to himself.

Upon adopting such a plan of procedure, the first surprise will be the added zest with which the work is undertaken. Also the unusual smoothness and speed with which the engagement progresses will be readily noticeable, the reasons therefor being the added interest and good-will of the assistants. No man ever accomplished great things alone.

The old method of telling the assistant nothing and assuming he knows less is all wrong. A story was told some time ago by one of the present in-charge accountants, whom we shall call Mr. A. Some years ago, shortly after Mr. A. became an assistant accountant on the staff of Haskins & Sells, he was sent out on an engagement with an in-charge accountant, whom we shall designate as Mr. X. During the engagement Mr. X. was continually asking Mr. A. questions of procedure, opinions, etc., and also gave him some accounts to analyze which seemed to be of especial importance. Mr. A. could not understand why he was being shown such deference by Mr. X. and concluded that Mr. X.'s ability must be open to question. However, the engagement was most satisfactorily completed. Later Mr. A. made some casual inquiries concerning Mr. X. and to his surprise found that Mr. X. was recognized as one of our most able accountants, and that he was a certified public accountant of several states.

Mr. X. is a favorite with all assistant accountants. There is no doubt but that much of his success as an accountant is due to the interest he shows in those with whom he is associated. Why cannot all in-charge accountants be like Mr. X.? By taking a whole-hearted interest in their fellow-assistants, in-charge accountants are helping their assistants to attain that knowledge and self-reliance which they need in order to be most helpful in time of need. The plan is practicable. It pays substantial dividends mentally, physically, and financially. Let's give it a trial.

### The Distortion of Surplus

**SURPLUS**, in its simplest conception, signifies an accumulation of profits. Thus, it was used probably in the earliest balance sheets, the exact date of which history has failed to record. In the process of

evolution, culminating in the present-day balance sheets of corporations particularly, it has lost much of its original significance. Now, frequently it serves as a convenient balancing figure, representing the excess of